



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHAN CHILDREN READ



QUARTERLY REPORT

Fiscal Year 2016 Quarter 3

Period: April 6, 2016 - June 30, 2016

Submitted to:

U.S. Agency for International Development/Afghanistan
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Submitted by:

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Photo Compliments of Jill Meeks

Executive Summary

This is the first quarter of the Afghan Children Read project. Project start-up is an exciting time of relationship-building, programming, planning, and negotiating proposed ideas with the on-the-ground realities. It is invigorating to bridge the ideas of USAID, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) Ministry of Education (MoE), and the project team to build a common understanding for the goals and objectives of the project, while fostering the joint responsibility and collaboration needed to achieve them.

It was clear that the most senior leadership of the MoE were eagerly awaiting the project's arrival. Together with the project team, they coordinated meetings and events to broaden and deepen the understanding amongst their lead Directorates and teams. Most critical to the long-term vision of a sustained national early grade reading program implemented in both formal and community based schools across Afghanistan are the Directorates of Planning, Curriculum, Teacher Education, Academic Supervision, Learning assessment, Social and Community Mobilization and General Education.

The security environment in Afghanistan is ever a concern for all parties involved, but the commitment to supporting improved educational services to Afghan children is greater than this concern. However, security does impact the who, where, and when of meeting and workshop participation, resulting in uneven attendance by the partner community. Insecurity also raises challenges for recruiting international expertise.

This Quarter concluded during Ramadan, but even during the Holy Month, the MoE remained mobilized and engaged throughout the program planning process, deliberating on the formation of technical task teams and making key decisions about the start-up of *Afghan Children Read*. Leading into the next Quarter, the project team is planning the second phase of workshop development alongside a post-Eid surge of coordination meetings, trainings, and model and materials development.

Acronyms

AHG	Afghan Holding Group
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CBE	Community Based Education
COP	Chief of Party
Creative	Creative Associates International
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
EA	Equal Access
ECCN	Education in Crisis & Conflict Network
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
GA	Gender Analysis
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
ICA	Institutional Capacity Assessment
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IR	Intermediate Results
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
NTA	National Technical Assistance Salary Scale
OCDP	Organizational Capacity Development Plan
Q	Quarter
QR	Quarterly Report
RERA	Rapid Education Risk Analysis
SG	Steering Group
SMES	School Management Effectiveness and Safety Survey
TED	Teacher Education Directorate
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YR	Year

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Program Description and Goal

Overview of the Program

Afghan Children Read is a USAID-funded primary education initiative designed to improve equitable access to education and generate measureable reading outcomes for girls and boys in Afghanistan. *Afghan Children Read* will support education service delivery, through building the capacity of the MoE to provide an evidence-based early grade reading (EGR) program (in Dari and Pashto) for students in grades 1 to 3 in both formal and Community-Based Education (CBE) schools. Strengthened skills, systems, models and materials will also enable future development of additional local mother-tongue languages into the national reading curriculum.

This project will build upon the foundation laid through the *Resources, Skills and Capacities in Early Grade Reading Project* (EGR Survey Project) also funded by USAID. The EGR Survey project is conducting preliminary assessments, research and surveying of the current climate for a national reading program, to conclude with results that will shape the focus and design of *Afghan Children Read*. *Afghan Children Read* will also complement and leverage other key USG and donor education-related investments in Afghanistan, including the CBE activity implemented by UNICEF, in-service and pre-service teacher training funded by GIZ, the coming EQUIP III program to be funded through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), and other donor investments.

The *Afghan Children Read* project period extends from April 6, 2016 through April 5, 2021. This project is contracted under an Advancing Basic Education: Access for All Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity task order. The task order results are intended to contribute to achieving USAID's strategic educational goals to:

1. Meet targets under Goals 1 and 3 of the USAID Education Strategy, 2011 - achieving direct outcomes in reading, while complementing existing investments in CBE and non-formal education.
2. Minimize the development of parallel systems in the education sector by providing technical assistance and partnerships with key MoE counterparts and working through host country systems to the extent possible, resulting in a national program that the GfRoa MoE can scale up both financially and technically through the ARTF.
3. Strengthen the policies, systems, and resources that are available to the MoE, particularly in the area of EGR.
4. Foster positive gender norms, including a highlighted attention to female students and teachers, who are the least likely to have access to schooling in Afghanistan.

The project is implemented by the consortium consisting of Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Afghan Holding Group (AHG), and two niche partners SIL-LEAD and Equal Access (EA). Creative is responsible for the overall management of the team in meeting the expectations of the *Afghan Children Read* contract.

Program Results Framework Overview

The aforementioned consortium will work closely and in concert to ensure the project results are met. While there are two distinct IRs (see Table I below): IR1. *Increase MoE capacity to implement an evidence-based EGR program* and IR2. *Pilot an evidence-based EGR program that improves reading results*, they are also mutually dependent. IR1 builds foundational capacity of the MoE for scaling the EGR intervention, but this scale-up cannot be actualized without the knowledge gained from IR2, for which the pilot serves as a learning laboratory.

Table I:

RESULT 1	The Ministry of Education, from the national, provincial, district, and school levels, is able to implement an evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program that benefits students in both formal and CBE classes
IR 1.1	Capacity of MoE, at national, provincial, and district levels built to develop, plan/budget for, manage, implement, and monitor an early grade reading curriculum and instruction program
IR 1.2	Policies, standards, and benchmarks that support improved early grade reading instruction in public and community based education classrooms developed and adopted
IR 1.3	National and sub-national early grade reading (EGR) assessments, data collection and analysis systems established
RESULT 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.1	Evidence-based early grade reading curriculum and instruction program developed
IR 2.2	Evidence-based early grade reading instructional materials in use in public and CBE classrooms
IR 2.3	Evidence-based early grade reading curriculum and instruction program implemented at the school level in public and CBE schools
IR 2.4	Procedures and systems for supervision, coaching, and monitoring of teachers and students implemented
IR 2.5	Partnerships with parents, school shuras, communities, the private sector, and nontraditional actors to increase equitable access to a quality education increased

The focus throughout the first Quarter has been on the project start-up, thus laying the foundation to achieve and report on *Afghan Children Read's* results.

Project Implementation Quarterly Progress

General Project Start-up

This first quarterly report of the *Afghan Children Read* project covers the period between April 6, 2016 and July 30, 2016. The starting date for *Afghan Children Read* is April 6, 2016. Given the project requirements to report against the fiscal year, our first project quarterly report is noted as YRI Q3 of the 2016 Fiscal Year and aligned with our project work plan.

Project Staffing

Progress achieved this Quarter

Creative received the project award on April 12, 2016 at which time Creative rapidly reactivated its SPOT access so as to begin fielding HQ staff for the mobilization of the partnership and initiating startup processes. Creative fielded the Chief of Party (COP), Deputy Chief of Party (DCOP), and Senior Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Specialist between mid-May and early June 2016. By the end of this reporting period, the Human Resources (HR) Manager and HR Officer were in place as well as the Logistics Officer and Translator for the Dari language. Consortium partners (sub-contractors) have also been working to identify and hire project personnel.

Challenges

Two relevant factors have negatively impacted the recruitment process. The first challenge was the security events that occurred during this quarter in Kabul, which have caused families of international recruits to convince them to withdraw their candidacy. The second challenge was the prevalence of Special Immigration Visas (SIVs) amongst the most highly qualified candidates for available positions. The U.S. Government agencies in Afghanistan, during this time, were also aiming to unify a mission policy regarding the hiring of SIVs. However, as new Mission policies came into practice, they did not match the expectations of potential recruits.

Furthermore, the National Technical Assistance Salary Scale (NTA) under discussion has the potential to diminish the incentives structure to attract potential highly qualified hires to change jobs and take on temporary, non-tenured employment on donor-funded projects. The NTA remains a worry as it does not consider the market value of private business enterprises in Afghanistan and their career structure and salary scales, which remain consistent whether applied to donor funded or commercial enterprises. Also, it does not recognize that project-based personnel are not provided job security or government benefits packages, which include longer term financial stability. Finally, project teams may be greatly restricted in hiring high caliber individuals whose skills are crucial to support the capacity-strengthening needs of ministries.

Creative has unexpectedly been faced with the task of replacing the Senior Education Advisor as the proposed candidate declined the opportunity post-award. At the time of this writing, a qualified and willing candidate has been identified and the approval process initiated.

Actions to be taken

A senior HR member from Creative HQ will continue to coordinate closely with in-country HR staff through Skype calls and video conferencing to maintain daily communication and support as the project continues its efforts to be fully staffed. At this time, we are no longer considering SIV holders due to the risk of frequent staff turn-over and decreased morale as a result of the inability to meet recruitment expectations regarding term of employment.

The project partnership will continue to participate in USAID led discussions on the NTA. The project partnership aims to contribute to a thoughtful reflection on how to address the issue of market value rates for employment, while also addressing the realities of a more diverse market place beyond the NGO-versus-Ministry comparison.

Office Setup

Progress achieved this Quarter

After a thorough search, Creative identified a building to serve as *Afghan Children Read's* office and secured a lease agreement. This office will serve as the project's main location and will include both the project office and residence for *Afghan Children Read's* international employees. The office is in a safe location and spacious enough to meet project requirements. The lower level of the building can accommodate meetings, events, and workshops, which will not only save on event costs, but will also provide better security than other locations in Kabul. Necessary security upgrades to make the building operational are in process, and furniture and fixtures are being installed at the time of this writing.

As of this writing, most of the logistics (i.e. furniture, fixtures and equipment) are being transferred to *Afghan Children Read* from another USAID project. The procurement process of additional equipment was initiated during the Quarter. Creative HQ's procurement team arrived in Kabul near the end of Q3 and will remain into Q4 to ensure timely logistical arrangements required for smooth operations of the project.

Challenges

Renting of an appropriately sized project site in a secured neighborhood posed a greater challenge than initially envisioned, as security checkpoints and road access issues were put in flux around properties of interest. A Creative HQ Senior Associate for Operations was deployed to Kabul to address the challenge and identified a new space and negotiated a secure lease.

Most of the items acquired through USAID stores and projects closing out were of sound quality and in good condition. However, some items received, such as at least one generator and some furniture and equipment, were not in sufficiently good condition to warrant installation or use. The longevity of the acquired project vehicles is also in question, especially given the security situation that requires reliable transport with an ability to accelerate quickly.

Actions to be taken

Security upgrades are underway with the new space and their installation is being monitored by Creative's Senior Associate for Operations as well as our Regional Protection Manager. The operations team has arranged for the installation of all acquired items and the project staff expect to occupy the new space by the end of July. The damaged or unnecessary items will be collected and disposed as per USAID regulations in the early part of Q4.

Technical Start-up

Progress achieved this Quarter

The technical priority of any new project starting up, especially when its focus is systems strengthening, is the introduction to and orientation of the government stakeholder, which in the case of *Afghan Children Read*, is the MoE. This process needs to be progressive and phased to broaden and deepen MoE understanding, thus enabling them to engage meaningfully in detailed planning. This process enhances MoE system capacity in the areas of negotiating program strategy, and applying and aligning approaches and activities with MoE priorities, perspectives, and current realities. Handling this process with patience and transparency is critical to establishing and building trusting relationships that will drive the project over the coming years. To this end, Creative conducted a host of meetings with and amongst USAID, the MoE and the HQ technical start-up personnel and the COP, once he was fielded. A list of startup-based field trips by HQ staff in the first few weeks of the project is available in Section 2 under Program Management. These preparatory visits led into an initial MoE stakeholder workshop to orient the Ministry to the program and initiate their engagement in the project Year 2 (October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017) work planning activities. The general agenda for this workshop and the list of participants is available in Annex I.



MoE stakeholder workshop, June 20-22, 2016
Photo Credit: Senior M&E Specialist, Afghanistan

The MoE stakeholder workshop offered an opportunity to gather the Directors and teams from leading MoE entities that need to be engaged in the building and implementing of a national EGR program. MoE officials engaged in the workshop from June 20 to 22 at the MoE's Science Center. The participation of the MoE across the three days was active and consistent, exceeding expectations given that the workshop was held for over four hours each day during the month of Ramadan. Creative HQ provided technical support through the mobilization of their internationally recognized Reading Expert who led workshop sessions on the scientific aspects of learning to read and the lessons learned worldwide through research and project implementation.

Colleagues from the EGR Survey project, a USAID-funded initiative, which provides the foundational data meant to inform the development of the *Afghan Children Read* strategies, participated and presented a project overview in this workshop. German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) colleagues also participated as the lead agency supporting the development of a lower primary school teacher certification program, an effort that *Afghan Children Read* technical experts are supporting. Along with Creative, all consortium partners contributed to and participated in the workshop: IRC, AHG, EA and SIL-LEAD.

Follow-up meetings were conducted with both the EGR Survey project and GIZ to understand more fully the current efforts underway and the means by which *Afghan Children Read* can build from or provide support to these activities—the EGR Survey and the GIZ pre-service efforts, respectively. Meetings with the EGR Survey project helped to clarify the tools, data, and deliverables' availability timeline for consideration by the *Afghan Children Read* project team. Meetings with GIZ were productive in achieving agreement on a rapid response plan for providing two module outlines specific to EGR that are to be incorporated into the pre-service certification program.

During this start-up period, the *Afghan Children Read* project team held initial conversations with MoE leadership on contract requirements related to the Rapid Education Risk Analysis (RERA) and the Gender Analysis. Given the current existence of the USAID-funded EGR Survey project, which

is fully dedicated to assessments and analysis, and the numerous donor-funded efforts to analyze Afghanistan's current climate, particularly in regards to education, the Ministry was understandably reticent to allow the *Afghan Children Read* team to launch into these activities. Prior to initiating these activities, the MoE wanted to review the project scope in-depth and have greater understanding and input into the information specifically needed to inform the implementation of this project.

Challenges

Two notable challenges confronted the project in the start-up phase. The first was the project team's realization of the misalignment of the performance periods for the EGR Survey Project and the start-up of *Afghan Children Read*. The second challenge came from concerns expressed by the MoE regarding timeline for the requested rapid assessment activities, which were to be done in the first 90 days of the contract.

The EGR Survey Project was designed as a precursor to *Afghan Children Read*. From the former, tools, data, and analytic reports were used to provide foundational knowledge to the design decisions of the latter. However, while tools may be available in July and August, data will not be available until at least November 2016. The Institutional Capacity Assessment (ICA), the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and the School Management, Effectiveness and Safety (SMES) survey findings were intended to be significant inputs to *Afghan Children Read's* conceptual approach to building a national EGR model and strengthening MoE capacity. The project had not anticipated receiving these findings 7 to 11 months into its implementation.

The draft RERA guidelines (undated), released in 2015, were designed as a pre-award exercise that missions should undertake prior to developing a program scope of work. The RERA was originally conceived as a pre-design activity conducted under the auspices of a government-to-government relationship for informing a future program design. In a post-award situation, a contractor-to-government relationship changes the dynamics of negotiation. Additionally, with a scope that has already been contracted, the focus narrows. As a contractor on a systems strengthening project where the MoE is to be respected as a lead decision maker, and where initiating this relationship early-on will influence the success of the next five years of project implementation, Creative must tread carefully.

Actions to be taken

The next phase of MoE meetings and work planning sessions will be conducted with technical task forces identified by the MoE. These task forces will be responsible for planning the MoE resources needed, available, and to be committed in order to achieve a set of target outcomes, which will be outlined in the work plan for YR 2.

Follow-up with the EGR Survey project to acquire the tools, data, and deliverables as they become available is ongoing. Project efforts will have to begin without the data from the ICA, EGRA, and

SMES. The teams' knowledge and experience with evidence-based EGR programming will inform these efforts. The project will undergo a continuous review and revision process throughout the life of the program to ensure data, findings, and experience are used to strengthen the model.

In the coming Quarter, the project EGR technical experts will complete the outline for the two modules being incorporated into the pre-service certification program, which will proceed through a MoE endorsement process. Once endorsed, our EGR technical experts will develop the actual pre-service modules in collaboration with the MoE Teacher Education Directorate (TED) team.

To address the challenges with the RERA and Gender Analysis, USAID has approved an extension of these deliverables to October 30, 2016 in anticipation that EGR Survey data may be available to support these assessments and other reports, though more recent updates would deem this unlikely. Creative has followed up with the Education in Crisis & Conflict Network (ECCN) technical advisors on the RERA to exchange views on the guidelines and explore a more contextualized, relevant, and responsive approach to shape the RERA specifically to the *Afghan Children Read* project needs. Currently, the desk review portions of the study are underway. Any primary data collection exercises are awaiting a review of tools from the EGR Survey as well as clarification for gaps that may exist in the literature.

Intermediate Result Specific Reporting

Many of the technical startup activities are crucial and will have a direct impact on *Afghan Children Read's* results. However, at this point of time, there are no direct intermediate and sub-intermediate results against which to report, as the project in this Quarter has been working at the macro level.

Project Deliverables

In this Quarter, considerable time was spent working on key deliverables of the project.

The YR1 Annual Work Plan (AWP) (April-September 2016) was submitted on June 2, 2016 and approved and accepted by USAID on June 16, 2016. This YR1 work plan was used as an input into a consultative process for the YR2 work plan development. It not only covers the activities for the first year of the project, but it also provides a detailed insight of project scope, technical approach, early grade reading assessments, and other important aspects over the life of project.

The Branding and Marking manual was developed in Creative HQ. Work on this began in May and a draft was submitted to USAID in the same month for approval. There were revisions requested by USAID which were addressed throughout the month of June. The final manual is ready to submit for approval in Quarter 4 (July-September 2016).

Work on the Grants Manual for *Afghan Children Read* began immediately after the award in April 2016. The Manual was developed in Creative HQ with contributions and feedback provided by

project staff. This manual will provide all the necessary guidelines to ensure that grant opportunities follow USAID regulations. The final manual is ready to submit for approval in Quarter 4 (July-September 2016).

The Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMEP) is in progress. The project's Senior M&E Specialist is working closely with Creative HQ M&E specialists and the COP to ensure it will provide an effective road-map for the implementation of *Afghan Children Read*. Creative HQ submitted the first draft on schedule in Q4.

Monitoring & Evaluation and Communications

1. Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

As stated above, the PMEP development is in progress as of this writing. Creative Field and HQ M&E staff have not yet collected data for submission.

2. Project Communications

Once *Afghan Children Read* has progressed towards implementation, more comprehensive success stories will be provided. Given that the project is in the start-up phase, only one success story is submitted. The submitted success story highlights the significance of the Technical Planning Workshop in June 2016 and is attached as Annex 2.

Project Management

1. Quarterly Budget Report

The Q3 Budget Report is included as Annex 3. Creative does not report on an accruals basis, but has included projections for July 2016.

2. Key Meetings/Field Trips Conducted

Position	Date	Purpose
Acting Senior Education Policy Advisor	April 30 – May 11 June 14 - 27	Project start up, 2016 Work Plan
Acting Project Director	April 30 – May 11	Project Start Up
Program Associate	June 14 – 27	Project Start Up, 2016 Work Plan
Senior Associate – Reading Specialist	June 17 – 30	Ministry of Education Early Grade Reading Workshop
Senior Project Manager	May 13 – 27	Project start up and procurement oversight
Procurement Officer	June 10 – July 20	Project start up and procurement oversight
Travel Planned for Next Quarter		
Procurement Officer	June 10 – July 20 (continued from previous quarter)	Project start up and procurement oversight
Project Director	July 30 – August 12	Provide direct support to project regarding Y2 annual work plan, working with key stakeholders
Senior Associate – Reading Specialist	August 12 – 17	Lead materials development workshop with Ministry of Education
Senior Multilingual Education Specialist – SIL-Lead	August 12 - 17	Support Ministry of Education material development teams
Education Specialist – IRC	Early August	Support Y2 annual work plan development
Senior International HR Manager	Unconfirmed	Support hiring of field staff and other key positions
Field IT Engineer	Unconfirmed	Support network and IT set up

Annexes

Annex I – Workshop Agenda and Participants List

Afghan Children Read Project Technical Kick-Off and Planning Workshop

MOE'S SCIENCE CENTER - JUNE 20 – 22, 2016

OVERALL GOAL

- Building a shared understanding among MOE leaders, partners and the project team for the design of the project and the expected engagement of all of the above in developing and implementing a national early grade reading program.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Develop an appreciation for the value of an early grade reading program
- Develop an understanding for lessons learned from countries implementing EGR programs
- Understanding the scope, implementation methodology, and intended results of the 5 year Afghan Children Read Project
- Have next steps mapped out for addressing Phase 1 activities
- Have a planned process for drafting and finalizing the Phase 2 work plan

Time	Agenda
DAY 1	
8:00 – 8:20	Welcoming Prayers, Remarks and introductions
8:20 – 8:30	Workshop agenda, general objectives, and Day 1 objectives
8:30 – 8:45	Project General Results Framework
8:45 - 9:15	MoE EGR experience to date
9:15 – 10:00	Evidence based EGR: What does the research tells us?
10:00 -10:15	Break
10:15 – 11:15	Successful EGR practice in the classroom
11:15 – 11:45	The EGR Survey project input to Afghan Children Read
11:45 – 12:00	Wrap-Up
Day 2	
8:00 – 8:15	Prayers, review Day 1 and today's objectives
8:15 – 8:30	Presentation of the Read Project capacity building strategy
8:30 - 9:30	Ministry Lead in the context of the READ project
9:30 – 9:50	SWOT review for key elements of an EGR
9:50-10:05	Break
10:05 – 10:45	SWOT presentations (5 min each)
10:45 – 11:45	Presentation on the project details
11:45 – 12:00	Wrap-Up
Day 3	
8:00 – 8:15	Prayers, review Day 1 and today's objectives
8:15 – 8:25	General review of the activity matrix structure
8:25 - 9:00	Activity matrix review of Phase 1 major activity areas
9:00 – 10:00	Activity planning for Phase 1 and 2 for major activity areas
10:00 – 10:15	BREAK
10:15 – 11:15	Small group presentation of activity planning (10 min each)
11:15 – 11:55	Next Steps

Technical Kick-Off and Planning Workshop Participants

USAID	
Project Management Specialist	
Project Management Specialist	
Creative Associates International	
Director - Education in Conflict Practice Area	
Chief of Party	
Deputy Chief of Party	
Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist	
Senior Associate	
Program Manager	
Translation Specialist	
Translator	
International Rescue Committee	
Education Coordinator	
Deputy Director M&E	
Equal Access	
Senior Program Manager	
Country Director	
Afghan Holding Group	
Managing Partner	
Director of Research	
Chief Executive Officer	
SIL-Lead	
Literacy Expert	
Linguist	
Teacher	
Chemonics Int.	
Chief of Party	
Deputy Chief of Party	
Education Specialist	
GIZ	
Education Advisor	
Education Officer	
Ministry Organization	
	Deputy Minister for General Education
	Advisor
Planning Department	General Director
	Sr. M&E Specialist
	Research and Eval. Manager
	System Analyst-EMIS
General Education	General Director
	Specialist

	Head of Basic Education
Girls Education	Director
	Head
Curriculum	General Director
	Director
	Head of Dari Language Dep
	Head of Pashto Language Dep
	Academic member
Academic Council	Director Quality Research
	Academic member
Teacher Education	General Director
	Director of Academic Affairs
	Academic member
	TTC Lecturer
	Academic member
Academic Supervision	General Director
	Specialist
	Officer
	Specialist
Science Center	General Director
Social Mobilization	General Director
	Manager
Sayed Jamaluddin TTC Exp. School	Teacher
	Teacher
MoE	Specialist
	Quality Control
	Advisor
EMIS	EMIS Officer

Annex 2 – Success Story

AFGHAN CHILDREN READ (ACR) PROJECT – AFGHANISTAN *Afghanistan's Readiness and Eagerness to Engage and Lead a National Early Grade Reading System*



The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) recognizes the importance of literacy in fostering economic growth, political stability, and sustainable peace for the country at large and has committed to improving education through its policy and planning efforts. However, teachers lack sufficient training, resources (including materials and curricula), and reinforcement through supervision, coaching, and mentoring to achieve early grade reading (EGR) and learning improvements. Persistent insecurity continues to affect education service delivery, including the ability to reach all learners. The solution lies in the Ministry of Education's (MOE) capacity to create and own a national EGR program that can be extended to all formal and community-based education (CBE) primary level classrooms. The question is, however, are national Afghan educators and

leaders ready for the challenge to change?

Despite being on the ground for only four months, the USAID-funded *Afghan Children Read* project has mobilized key MOE leaders and officials to identify risk factors and bottlenecks, and to improve early grade reading outcomes. Applying a capacity development approach, the project team held a number of consultations with the Ministry. These efforts involved the Deputy Minister for General Education and national level educators and leaders from the MoE's Directorates. The Deputy Minister for General Education said very decisively early on in these consultations:

"The Ministry's ultimate interest through the Afghan Children Read project is a well-established EGR system for Afghanistan and capable human resources that can operate the system for the benefit of children's education in early grades."

The consultations were critical to securing the MoE's commitment to involve all its EGR-related departments and Directorates in a three-day, kick-off technical workshop hosted and led by the *Afghan Children Read* team during Ramadan. Despite fasting from sunrise to sunset, the participants' level of engagement, participation, and eagerness to learn about and understand what it takes to improve literacy among young children, was inspiring. The workshop aimed to build a shared understanding among MOE leaders, partners, and the project team about the design of the project and the expected engagement of all stakeholders in developing and implementing a national early grade reading program. It ended with an action plan and assignments for several MOE key officials on moving forward with project implementation. At its closing, an MOE employee addressed the participants with a statement that reinforces the country's commitment to education and addresses their readiness for change:

"Afghan Children Read is a great opportunity to make a difference for our children's education. Let's not waste it."



Photo Credit: Senior M&E Specialist, Afghanistan

Annex 3 – Quarterly Budget Report

Line Items	Approved Budget	Expenditures through June 30, 2016	Projections		Total Actual + Projections Costs	Available Funds
			Accrued *	Pipeline July 1 – 31, 2016		
Labor	\$6,250,166	\$112,717	-	\$108,459	\$221,176	\$6,028,990
Fringe Benefits	\$2,362,123	\$42,833	-	\$41,001	\$83,834	\$2,278,289
Allowances	\$3,315,718	\$28,593	-	\$43,258	\$71,851	\$3,243,866
Consultants	\$276,380	\$9,116	-	\$1,563	\$10,679	\$265,702
Travel, Transportation and Per Diem	\$793,590	\$10,826	-	\$9,742	\$20,568	\$773,022
Equipment and Supplies	\$2,144,940	\$31,525	-	-	\$31,525	\$2,113,415
Other Direct Costs	\$2,543,867	\$130,418	-	\$107,702	\$238,121	\$2,305,746
Subcontracts	\$10,936,852	-	-	\$92,750	\$92,750	\$10,844,102
Security	\$4,235,004	\$7,194	-	\$79,039	\$86,233	\$4,148,772
Grants Under Contract	\$7,000,000	-	-	-	-	\$7,000,000
Program Activities	\$14,168,854	-	-	\$174,868	\$174,868	\$13,993,986
Total Direct Costs	\$54,027,494	\$373,222	-	\$658,383	\$1,031,605	\$52,995,890
Indirect Costs	\$11,953,884	\$128,590	-	\$180,591	\$309,181	\$11,644,704
Grants Under Contract Fee	\$175,000	-	-	-	-	\$175,000
Fixed Fee	\$3,391,429	\$178,321	-	\$48,241	\$226,562	\$3,164,867
Total	\$69,547,808	\$680,133	-	\$887,215	\$1,567,348	\$67,980,460

Obligated Funds as of	\$20,000,000
Expenditures as of	\$680,133
Remaining Obl. Funds	\$19,319,867

* Creative Associates does not account on an accruals basis, therefore this section of the report will always be \$0.